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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND ITS' RELATIONSHIP TO THE MILITARY FAMILY AS A UNIT.

"True education... embraces an earnest desire for the guidance of the father of our spirits..." [1]

"What is religious education?" "What is the purpose of religious education?" These questions were presented to a group of chaplains who were in attendence at a seminar. During the period that followed there was much discussion taking place in several small assigned groups. Out of this there were approximately ten composit statements made and presented. All of the statements were varied, yet most carried a general underlying theme which I would like to touch on in this paper.

The following are examples of statements that were made: (1) "Religious education is a process of guiding individuals to discover and meet their religious needs." (2) "To meet the needs of the individual in his religious growth process." (3) "Religious education communicates bibilically based faith through a loving community, to help the individual grow in a right relationship with himself, others and God." (4) "To incorporate the individual into the living religious community and give him access to its' message of love, wisdom and experience. To give him emotional support and to enable him to begin to participate in and contribute to the on-going life of the community." (5) "To enable the military family to confront the grace of God and His love, to the end that they may grow in faith and accept themselves and the world in which they live." (6) "Religious education should minister to the growth of the whole person, provide a learning situation in Judeao/Christian ethics, provide a relating situation, man to man and provide a service base from which man can serve his fellow man."

(7) "The purpose of religious education is to instruct the military family in principals of doctrine, practices and ideals."

There is not room to list all of the statements that were given, however those given above cover the general theme. After reading all of the statements I find that certain words, or phrases were common to more than one statement, such as; love of God, real world, whole man, grow or growth, total life, needs and military family.

In doing further reading on the subject of religious education, its" meaning and goals, I became aware of information I had not known before. Howard Grimes, in his book "The Church Redemptive", states that "to attempt a definition is to risk being presumptuous." Other authors and church men said that they did not find it easy to describe or define christian education, and in fact concluded that it is an open-ended question.

William B. Williamson, in his book "Language and Concepts in Christian Education." mentions that several Authors find it difficult to define religious education in a single clear and true statement. Mr Williamson goes on to say, "while all definitions were written by 'experts' in religious education, they do not yield a unified answer nor indeed even a broadly homogeneous one."

With this information as a background, let us consider some of the statements of additional authors on the subject of "Religious Education, and its' Aims and Purposes." (1) "To nurture and train the members of the parish of all ages through worship and encounter with the meaning of the gospel for their lives, that they may live gloriously and carry on the mission of the church in all situations."[2] (2) " To remake, remold, transform and reconstruct the experience

of the children, youth, and adults with whom we live and work that they will experience their lives as the life in Christ."[3] (3) "Not merely the imparting of relogious knowledge; it is also the work of building christian community within which both verbal language and the language of relationships mutually reinforce each other in communicating the gospel of reconciliation and hope to man in his estrangement and despair."[4] (4) "True education, to my mind, embraces an earnest desire for guidance of the father of our spirits..."[5]

In man's relationship to man there is no doubt that secular or general education is necessary. Religious men will agree that religious education is necessary, or at least desireable. In my humble opinion, ALL education should be undertaken with the belief that one day we will be called on to account for what we know or do not know, and what we have taught or have not taught. I believe that all truth is from God, whether it be classified as secular or religious. "The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth."[6] The things we learn in this life are not lost to us in the life hereafter, but are ours forever. "Whatever principle of intelligence we attain in this life, will rise with us in the resurrection. And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come."[7] If this be true, and I believe it is, then we should be careful and selective of what we learn and what we teach. We should also put forth great effort to obtain a good, well rounded education in the ways of God.

People (to include the whole military family) who claim to be children of God, need an abiding testimony combined with a perfect knowledge regarding the divinity of the work in which they are engaged. it is their duty to learn the truth and to share it with those who do not have it. The key to happiness in this life is to work for the happiness of others.

The need for better religious education is constant. The following statement was made by a religious leader in the year 1889; "Unless we provide better means of religious education for the rising generation, I fear that many of them will turn away from the truth."[8] Today we are always searching for better means and methods of instruction to prevent the present church members from "falling away."

Considering the common elements and overall theme expressed in the statements on religious education, the goal of religious education is; a perfect knowledge of God, to include eternal life. The means to attain this goal are, internal and external efforts to produce growth. Love and service in relationship to God and man are key elements of this process.

There are many programs of religious education that exist in the world today, yet the need for a more effective program is apparent. "A viable christian education must demonstrate, both theologically and educationally, that man is a spiritual being at home in a natural world."[9] A complete, well rounded and coheasive religious education program needs to be formulated to serve the military family in the military community. "Historical change, religious experience and knowledge, these have become the key questions in developing a philisophy of christian education."[10]

The major problem to overcome in the implementation of any one plan offered, is the theological differiences between those chaplains who would be called on to accept and administer the program. With this in mind I would like to share some thoughts with the reader, on a prover, workable program that could be adapted to the military environment.

The process of religious education should start in the home when the child is very young. In fact, thoughts could start forming in the mind of the mother-to-be as soon as she realizes that she is going to give birth to one of "God's children." This should continue as an educative and supportive role throughout the life of the child.

In the first step, the beginnings should be in the home. The suggested age would be from 0-to-3 years. A chaplain team could be formed to implement this program. This team would be primarily involved with brief but regular monthly home teaching visits to the family unit. This would help the parents provide an informal educational base for this age group and a supportive role for future family learning. This team would have to have in-depth support from the lay members.

Second; the age group between 3 and 11, would have a formal program twice per week. The emphasis at mid-week would be on social and physical aspects of religious education, and the sunday school would focus on the mental and spiritual growth. A chaplain team should cover this program with strong lay involvement from women members.

Third; the age group from twelve to twenty. This program would be covered by another chaplain team, and continue on a twice weekly basis. The areas of emphasis would be the same, but the association would be on a more advanced level with more mature goals. this is simular to the existing PYOC,CYOC.etc.

Forth; The age group over twenty. This would consist of a continuation of service oriented mid-week groups and mental-spiritual aspects of sunday school. These mid-week groups now exist in the form of PMOC, PYOC, etc. Two or more chaplain teams could supervise this program.

Fifth; a special edcation program to be held in addition to sunday school for men above the age of 12. This would be heavy in the theological aspects of the mental and spiritual. The goal of this program would be to help develope strong lay leadership.

Correlation and coordination seems to be a key factor in the organizing, implementing and supervizing the program to make it effective in the military environment. Another important factor in a succesful program is involvement of the lay member in leadership roles beginning at youth.

The program begins in the home. "No amount of worldly success can compensate for failure in the home."[11] "The most important work we will ever do, will be within the walls of our own home."[12] "In the gospel plan families are forever. The greatest joys here and in the hereafter have their beginnings in happy homes where the gospel is taught and lived."[13]

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